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Q1(e)

Explain Leela Dube's concept of "Seed and Earth"

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Explain **Leela Dube's** concept of "**Seed and Earth**"
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

- **Seed and Earth is a kinship metaphor:** man as seed, woman as field.

It supports **patriliney**, son preference and control of women's sexuality.

Caste endogamy needs this reproductive ideology.

It is regionally specific, not all of India.

Law can grant daughters property while the idiom still organises marriage.

Introduction

Leela Dube used Seed and Earth as a kinship metaphor that organises gender in much of Hindu North India. The man is imagined as seed, the woman as earth, and that image justifies **patriliney**, hypergamy, and control of women's sexuality.

Body**The metaphor**

- Seed is the active substance that names the child. Earth is the vessel that nourishes but does not confer the line.
- The idea naturalises patrilineal descent and the preference for sons who continue the seed.
- Women's bodies become fields to be guarded, which links seclusion, early marriage, and **honour** to property.

What it does sociologically

- Dube showed that gender is not a side topic of caste. Reproduction of jati through endogamy needs this body ideology.
- The same logic devalues women's work and widow's claims, because the field without the rightful seed is treated as dangerous.
- It is not the only Indian gender model. Matriliney in parts of the south-west and many tribal systems do not run on this pair, which is why Dube insisted on regional comparison.

Limit

- Law now gives daughters inheritance rights. The seed-earth idiom still shapes who actually farms and who is sent away at marriage.

Flow diagram

Seed male line -> Patriliney son preference
Earth female body -> Guarding sexuality
Patriliney son preference -> Caste continuity
Guarding sexuality -> Caste continuity

Conclusion

Seed and Earth is Dube's name for a reproductive ideology that makes men the line and women the soil. It explains why caste endogamy and patriarchy travel together, even when statutes speak of equal heirs.

Facts & figures

Leela Dube

Anthropologist who linked gender, kinship, and caste through the seed-earth idiom.

Patriliney

The child belongs to the father's line because seed, not gestation, is said to name identity.

Honour

Control of the 'field' becomes family honour and a reason for restrictions on women.

Regional contrast

Matrilineal and many tribal systems show that the metaphor is not a universal Indian fact.

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